

Significance of Presentation:

This presentation was part of a panel series on Pakistan's media at the Annual Conference on South Asia at Madison, WI. The theme of the panel was the 'transformations' of Pakistan's media, both that have occurred and are currently ongoing, and my paper described a transformation of the country's television news industry. In recent years scholarship on Pakistan has taken a productive turn to studying the country from a variety of perspectives rather than focusing mostly on security studies and looking at the country through ideas of religious extremism; the country's media has remained an understudied area. This panel was the first time that those of us who are graduate students in the US working on the country's media came to know about each other, where we study, and each other's research projects.

My paper's particular significance was that I shared new knowledge about the country's emerging local television news industry that I discovered while conducting my ethnographic fieldwork in Lahore. There is a movement among newswriters in Lahore to create what I conceptualize as "specific accountability" news television and these news workers' efforts emerge from a larger societal demand to make Pakistan's national politics more accessible, identifiable, and participatory. Though this transformation of Pakistan's news television is in its early stages, the dissipation of the country's choreographed national-level news television is reshaping the nature of political engagement in the country and has significant implications for Pakistani society. There have been few studies of either the context of the privatization of Pakistan's television industry or the implications of the mushroom growth of private 24-hour news television news channels in the country. My goal for the dissertation chapter from which this paper emerges is to demonstrate how news workers at City42 are part of the larger movement among newswriters, how they repurpose formats of global 24-hour news television for local purposes, and how they are site of possibility for a regeneration of what the news can be and do. This paper sheds light on how the television news industry in Pakistan is functioning, why it functions in these certain ways, and how Pakistan's television news channels are related to global trends in television news and other forces such as the spread of economic liberalism. Finally I hope that this project contributes to a body of work that encourages a grounded approach to the study of the emergence of 24-hour news channels that complicates theories of market forces and elite control of the news media. In this vein, this paper is part of my effort to contribute to the field of Pakistan studies by demonstrating through my work how existing theoretical work in media studies can be challenged and enriched by scholarship emerging from the study of Pakistan.